

**say what you mean  
(out loud)**

**Redburn**

## say what you mean (out loud) by Redburn

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**Summary:**

*Richie can't help it when something heavy refuses to leave his stomach, something relentless and daunting. He looks at Eddie and can't help but want, can't help but need, watching this boy watch the stars and thinking he would be happy to spend the rest of his life just like this, right here standing next to him.*

Or, Richie realizes he likes Eddie and promptly goes through the five stages of grief.

## say what you mean (out loud)

### Author's Note:

god this movie was amazing and the cast was amazing, so how could I not fall in love with these characters??

and despite the summary this story is actually pretty sappy, so be prepared! :P

(I've also thrown in a bunch of 80s movie quotes because why the fuck not right??)

and there is now a [Russian Translation](#) thanks to the lovely [Unforgiven2205](#) :3

Out of everyone in the Losers Club, Richie found he likes to tease Eddie the most.

In the beginning, the group (if you could call it that then) had started as just himself and Bill. Richie felt Bill was too nice to ever really poke fun at, especially after being on the receiving end of his Disappointed Friend stare on more than one occasion – it was like letting Santa down that first Christmas he didn't receive a present from him.

Stan had joined up not too long after, and while Richie found himself letting his big-ass mouth loose more often than not, he still wasn't getting back as much bite as he wanted.

Until Eddie came along, that is.

The kid was like a small, burning ball of fire, wrapped up in an even tighter ball of hypochondria and snark's that had Richie caught so off-guard multiple times just from how incredibly witty they were.

It was the banter Richie had been waiting all his life for. The banter he *deserved*.

And it was fucking exhilarating.

He hadn't noticed when it happened; how so many of his insults were

now directed towards Eddie and Eddie only. He'd even made up a file in his head entitled *Eddie's Mom Just Wants To Have Fun* to use at any time during the day. Sure, he kept up appearances and poked fun at the whole gang, but the reality was: *no one* gave as good clap-backs as Eddie Kaspbrak.

And for one Richie Tozier, you could probably mark that was when things started to spin way out of control...

\*

In the days following their blood oath to always come back to each other in times of need, Richie realizes that life at home (or in Derry in general) wouldn't ever quite be the same.

Turns out annihilating a fucking demon clown from hell will do that to a person.

The nightmares aren't frequent, but they do happen, and every time it does Richie wakes up to his heart jack-hammering in his chest as he tries to blink the tears away. Often times Richie catches himself about to spill everything to his parents. The urge to tell someone – *anyone else* – about what had happened that summer was a constant itch under his skin. But of course anyone would think you're insane, and Richie wasn't all that keen on giving his parents another reason to add to the constant neglect.

So he does the one thing no one ever comes to expect from him anymore: he keeps his mouth shut.

(Although that doesn't mean he won't continue to ramble on about it to the rest of the Losers, though.)

"Hey asswipes," he greets the remaining Losers one afternoon.

They had said their final goodbyes to Bev a few days ago, seeing her off to live with her aunt in cloudy Portland. Mike had reluctantly returned to his family's farm, but promised he would visit as often as possible. There was an unexpected ache in Richie's chest to not see everyone all together, but he was always glad to have these guys still.

Ben briefly glances up from the book he's reading to wave back, while Bill and Stan both shake their heads at him before returning to the game of marbles they have set up.

"Are you implying you secretly don't wipe your own ass?" says Eddie from his position atop a stack of newspapers Bill's dad never bothers to throw away. "Disgusting."

"Hey, is that a rat with rabies near your hand?" Richie mock gasps and laughs when Eddie flinches so hard he topples to the ground.

"Not funny, you dick," says Eddie as he brushes down his pants.

Richie tries to maintain the giggles still lingering in his throat, and walks over until he's close enough to Eddie to be able to pinch his cheeks. "Cute, cute, *cute*. You're really just too cute not to pick on, Eddie Spaghetti."

Eddie slaps his hands away with a scowl, but doesn't make a move to step away, instead looking down to pick his fingers along the rough material of his cast. Richie follows the movement and feels a pang of guilt, not allowing his mind to linger on that dreadful day – of almost losing to *It*.

"Hey, w-we're starting the game again, you guys w-w-wanna join?" Bill calls over to them, and Richie finds himself subconsciously stepping out of Eddie's space. Eddie shrugs and leads the way.

The day passes by virtually uneventful. The marbles are packed up before they say goodbye to Ben, and they all decide to head inside and up to Bill's room. Eddie claims a spot on the bed and Richie doesn't think twice when he plops down next to him, sticking his elbow out to lightly jab into Eddie's side repeatedly.

"*What*, fuckface?" snaps Eddie, eyes narrowing.

Richie simply grins back, secretly loving how Eddie's little nose will scrunch up whenever he's exasperated.

"Can you let your mom know I won't be able to make it over tonight? Sadly I double booked," taunts Richie.

Eddie's eyes flash. "Fine. If you tell *your* sister to start using chapstick – I'm sick of getting dry as fuck blowjobs."

"Okay you two," interjects Stan, while Bill moves about to set up some music. Richie sinks further into the bed, finding his foot brushing against Eddie's as he swings it back and forth.

After arguing about the music choices and Richie yelling "Death by stereo!" did they finally manage to settle on some AC/DC, and soon they all pull out some of their favourite comic books to discuss. During which, Richie can't help but sneak occasional glances to his left, raptly watching the rise and fall of Eddie's chest or how his hand twitches near his absent fannypack or slowly memorizing the slopes of his nose and lips. It isn't until he feels curious stares aimed towards him that he promptly snaps out of his trance.

"Cat got your tongue there eh, Richie?" asks Stan.

"Huh?" says Richie.

"Y-you haven't s-said anything for a while, w-we got worried," says Bill, clearly teasing. Richie feels betrayed.

"Whatever," is all Richie can come up with, suddenly nervous. He crosses his arms and pretends to look at something out of Bill's bedroom window, but takes one moment to observe Eddie again.

Eddie is staring right back at him, one eyebrow lifted in question. Richie feels his cheeks flush warm, embarrassed at being caught out, and goes to push his glasses further up his nose, desperate for Eddie's attention on him to go away.

When he feels Eddie's foot brush against his again, something hot twists in his gut, unable to ignore and seeping deep into his bones.

*Oh, fuck,* thinks Richie.

\*

So... that happened.

Richie was still debating what 'that' was as he paced back and forth

outside the arcade's entrance.

He was supposed to be meeting Bill for a re-match on their favourite machine, but the other boy was uncharacteristically late and so Richie took the time to unwillingly let his internal struggles manifest. It was already some days later after they'd all been hanging out at Bill's, and Richie may or may not have been deflecting Eddie's calls to hang out with him.

And considering how hard it was for Eddie to convince his mom to let him out of the house now, he felt like double the asshole to blow his friend off like that.

"H-heh man," Bill finally appears behind him, only slightly out of breath.

Richie turns on him quickly. "Dude! Where the hell were you?" he accidentally snaps.

"S-sorry, got caught up."

Richie goes to open the door and speaks over his shoulder to Bill. "When you commit to meeting someone you gotta stick to it. I turned down multiple babes just for you!"

Bill doesn't take the bait as he takes his spot next to Richie, putting the quarter in the slot and watching their two fighter players appear up on the pixelated screen. Richie, not one to ever allow defeat, wins 2 out of 3 games and makes it known to the entire rest of Derry.

It's not until after they leave and take a walk through the main street that Richie turns to Bill with a squint.

"So why were you late, anyway?" asks Richie, walking backwards and keeping his sights on Bill.

Bill avoids his gaze momentarily, rubbing at his flushed neck. "I w-was... writing to Bev."

Richie's brows raise, followed closely by a knowing grin.

"That's so cute, man. Didn't think you had it in ya," says Richie,

stopping briefly to slap Bill's back proudly.

"Shut up," says Bill, but he's smiling, so it's only half-hearted. "Bet you d-didn't expect to be one-upped by a s-stutterer, huh?"

"Whoa," breathes Richie, mildly impressed. "And as if. I'm fucking *swimming* in ladies, man. I feel like I'm running a delicatessen here, calling out numbers like, '*Pussy number seven, please!*'"

"Beep, beep Richie," says Bill as his look turns unimpressed, and that's not new, but then he frowns thoughtfully before adding: "Eddie asked me if you're alright today. Says he h-hasn't heard from you in a while."

Richie feels his heart jerk, and he throws Bill his most convincing grin. "I'm *always* alright. Sure, sometimes it's hard to be this awesome but I always try to make time for—"

"Richie," says Bill, and his voice is soft. "Did something happen?"

Richie hopes his smile doesn't waver when he swallows around the lump threatening to cut off his air. "Nothing happened. We're fine. Everything's fine. Ol' Eddie Spaghetti's imagining things."

It's obvious no amount of reassuring Bill is going to convince him, so Richie leaves it at that, walking faster ahead and feeling his best-friend's curious stare pin to his retreating back.

\*

Months had passed and the Losers Club were now well prepared for their first year of high school. Not to say that Derry paid much care to dividing up the school into proper years, but Richie liked to mark this year as their unofficial freshman introduction.

They all met up outside the school's main entrance, all waiting for Mike to pull up on his bike. They'd spent the summer convincing Mike's grandfather to enroll him in public school, where the Losers would take him under their care. It had taken time, but then it finally paid off.

"There he is!" shouts Stan when Mike begins to walk over to them.



“Mikey, hey!”

Mike speeds up into a jog, and everyone pulls him into a group hug, congratulatory words and chants spilling out between them all as they get pumped up for their first day.

“Losers, unite!” yells Richie, and everyone follows with a cheer.

The others take the lead, all guiding Mike inside and talking excitedly, but Richie hangs back until he can get Eddie alone.

“Eds, my main man,” says Richie, slinging his arm around the shorter boy’s shoulders.

“Stop it,” groans Eddie, fixing a strand of hair that falls into his eyes. It’s gotten longer and curlier over the summer. Richie finds he quite likes it.

He clears his throat. “Just think, Eds, we’re no longer considered kids anymore by society’s standards. We are now full-blooded men, although your mom would consider me even more so.”

Eddie sighs exasperatedly. There are a number of freckles splattered across his nose and cheeks now – the result of Eddie’s mother not being as overbearing about how much sunscreen he should wear outside. They’re ridiculously endearing, and Richie hates how much he wants to run his fingertips over each and every one, because *what the fuck*, Richie Tozier did *not* sign up to be President Mc-Fucking-Sappy.

“God, why are we friends again?” says Eddie rhetorically.

Richie answers anyway. “Do I look like someone who cares about what God thinks?”

“You *look* like a guy who can’t *see* anything,” quips Eddie, stopping them both on the steps. He reaches out to pluck Richie’s glasses off his nose. “When was the last time you cleaned these?”

“Yippie ki-yay, who the fuck cares?” answers Richie helpfully, even as Eddie pulls out a cloth to begin wiping away the dust. Richie watches through blurry vision how delicately Eddie handles it, eyes

focused and brows pinched. Richie wants to kiss him.

“Here,” says Eddie, not even waiting for Richie to take them and placing them back on Richie’s face slowly. Richie swears the touch of Eddie’s fingers leave burn marks as they go.

“W-we better get to class,” stammers Richie. He marches on quickly, hoping by the time they reach their homeroom the blush on his cheeks will have died down.

\*

The thing is – Richie *likes* his friend group the way it is. He thinks if any more kids joined they could most definitely perform their own self-funded production of Annie. Everyone brought their own quirk to the group, it was balanced; it was *complete*.

Only somehow, Richie had never accounted for the possibility of someone bringing along a... *significant other* to the mix (although one might argue that Bill invited Bev into the group, but she was cool, so Richie had no beef.) And last time he checked, he was sure the only person in the group with enough backbone to make any romantic moves was Ben after he’d kissed Bev in front of everyone back down in the sewers.

So to come to a stop in the halls and see Eddie up ahead, chatting to a girl by his locker, pretty much threw Richie for a loop.

*Since when did ol’ Eds possess the moves to pull that off?* thought Richie, not at all missing the edge of bitterness to his words.

The girl’s long hair was braided down her back, swaying about as she laughs loudly at something Eddie says. As Richie steps closer, he can see the bashful expression Eddie displays more clearly and how the girl begins to reach out to touch the friendship bracelet – the one *Richie* gave him, dammit – that rests along his right wrist.

Richie knows a flirt when he sees one, and the unexpected rage he suddenly feels brewing in his gut pushes him over until Eddie catches sight of him.

“Oh, hey, Rich—” begins Eddie, only Richie cuts him off.

"I know he's too nice to say anything, but Eddie's not a fan of strangers touching him," says Richie to the girl, making sure to stand right between them.

"Excuse me?" the girl questions, looking over to Eddie.

"Richie, *what the hell?*" whispers Eddie harshly, before turning back to offer an explanation her. "Don't listen to him, we all call him 'Trashmouth' because half the shit he says is total garbage—"

"Look, I don't know what your game here is, *toots*," continues Richie while holding back a sneer. "But we're not falling for it. So just keep on stepping, alright?"

"What's *your* problem?" the girl says, eyeing him up and down. "Is someone's *ego* a little bit bruised?"

"Oh, that's *it*," starts Richie, only Eddie holds him back with surprising force, already dragging him away.

"*Move*, asshole," says Eddie as Richie calls back to the girl one last time.

"I'm Richie Tozier, bitch! You mess with me, you're messing with the best!"

"Enough!" snaps Eddie, and Richie, for once, listens.

They make their way down the steps and out onto the lawn, finding a more secluded spot past all of the students leaving school for the beginning of the long awaited weekend. Eddie finally lets him go with a shove, giving Richie an obvious 'what the fuck?' look.

Richie sighs, looking away and shuffling his feet in the dirt.

"What, *now* you're out of words?" says Eddie incredulously.

Richie throws his hands in the air. "Dude, she was clearly just using you for a laugh! Remember Greta Keene? How she tricked you into writing 'Loser' on your cast?"

"What, so I should expect every girl in school to never genuinely like

me, is that it? What the fuck, Richie?” says Eddie, hurt.

“No, that’s not—” Richie stops, the words getting stuck in his throat. *If you get a girlfriend, you’ll hang out with us less – hang out with me less*, Richie thinks desperately. *I don’t want you to forget me, please.*

They both fall quiet. Richie uses any reason to avoid Eddie’s piercing stare. He knows he’s pathetic, to blame Eddie for any of this, or that girl, even. Why did he have to get so *angry*? When the silence becomes too much, Richie finally looks up. Eddie is frowning, and after a long moment he steps closer, his dark brown eyes never wavering.

*You’re so beautiful*, thinks Richie.

“Hey,” says Eddie, and his voice is softer than Richie expected. “Do you... wanna sleep over at my house tonight? Get a... break from your pigsty of a room.”

Richie blinks, not at all having anticipated the offer. He looks down at the friendship bracelet again and feels his heart skip a beat, then he clears his throat. “Y-yeah, thanks. Sounds good.”

There’s another pause, and then Eddie is bumping their shoulders together, ushering him along. Richie feels a shiver run up his arm when their hands brush accidentally, and he makes himself promise to not get mad at Eddie again about something as dumb as this.

“I’m sorry, Eds,” murmurs Richie as they begin to walk home.

“I know,” says Eddie. “And don’t call me ‘Eds’.”

\*

“I’m so excited Bev is visiting! And for two whole weeks!” says Ben as they all wait patiently at the Derry bus terminal on a Saturday afternoon. “Hard to believe it’s been a year already.”

Richie nudges Bill’s arm lightly. “I can’t wait to see you and Ben fight over Bev’s attention,” whispers Richie.

“We’re n-not going to fight for it,” says Bill, but Richie knows how

much his friend has been waiting for her to return.

“Whatever you say, big guy,” says Richie, looking over to where Eddie, Mike and Stan are currently in a debate about whether making a *Back to the Future* part four could actually work.

“What’s next then, a time travelling Boeing 737? A goddamn *river boat*?” scoffs Eddie.

“The machine itself doesn’t matter. But are you telling me George doesn’t think it’s weird to have a son look exactly like a kid he knew when he was younger? No! Marty’s parents *totally* know he time travels!”

“I just want a hover board, is that too much to ask?”

“Guys, she’s here!” exclaims Ben, pointing to the bus currently approaching down the street.

Richie sees Bill’s face light up, walking over to stand next to Ben, right near the bus’s sliding door. When Beverly steps out her lips stretch out into the biggest smile, and she rushes forward to pull the two boys into a tight embrace. Mike takes the lead and joins in, followed by the rest of them.

“F-finally, the gang’s all back together!” says Bill, grinning along with everyone else.

“We almost replaced you a couple times, Bev, but we could never find a girl as tough as you,” says Richie, to which Bev rolls her eyes fondly.

“It’s great to be back,” she says, her expression turning shy when she meets Bill’s eyes.

“We’re all going to the quarry right now, want to come?” asks Stan.

“Sure, that sounds nice,” says Bev. Ben offers to carry her bag for her, and soon they all start the long walk to the lake, each of them taking turns to ask Bev questions about her life in Portland.

The warm, pelting heat of the summer sun basks down on them, and

Richie for one was more than ready to jump head first into the lake with no hesitations. They all took their leap one by one, only Richie waits for Eddie to go before him, wanting to make sure his friend lands safely first.

“You still scared, Trashmouth?” asks Eddie with a smirk.

“It’s ladies first, you know that,” says Richie.

“Oh, fuck you,” says Eddie, taking the final step and disappearing out of sight. Richie watches him go down and waits for his heart to calm down, before following suit with a tremendous splash.

He surfaces ungracefully, already seeking out Eddie to splash him playfully. Soon everyone joins in, and suddenly people are being dunked and arms and legs are flailing everywhere. Richie notices Eddie try to catch his breath during a particularly rowdy moment.

“Hey, you need your inhaler?”

Eddie shakes his head. “I’m fine. You don’t have to treat me like a princess, you know.”

Richie pouts dramatically. “But Eds,” he teases, “You’re just so gosh darn pretty, I simply can’t help it!”

He reaches out to tickle at Eddie’s sides, smiling widely when Eddie begins to laugh. When Eddie puts up a bigger protest Richie stops, feigning horror as he grabs onto Eddie tightly.

“Did you feel that?” he asks.

Eddie looks around them, eyes wide. “No, what?”

“There it is again! It’s near my foot!” shouts Richie, grabbing the attention of the other Losers now. “Stay completely still!”

Everyone does, waiting for whatever it is that has Richie freaking out so much, until finally, Richie lets one loose and his fart bubbles to the surface of the lake.

“No worries, it’s gone now,” laughs Richie.

“Oh my god, gross!” says Eddie, shoving him away quickly.

Richie falls back, still laughing, and hears the groans around him from all of his friends. “That’s what I love about nature, you know? It’s just one big toilet,” he says.

When the tips of his fingers turn wrinkly they all agree to dry off and have a bite to eat. Richie lays out his towel to share with Eddie, and Eddie pulls out a sandwich for them both to share. It’s turkey, Richie notices, which is his favourite. He leans back to rest on his elbow, trying to look more discreet as he observes Eddie. There’s water still dripping down his back from his hair, trailing over a soft pink hue on his shoulders from the sun.

A throat clears, and Richie’s head snaps over to meet Beverly’s pointed gaze, eyebrows rising in question. Richie shoves the rest of his sandwich in his mouth, pretending to poke at an ant-hill near his foot.

It isn’t until later when the others jump into the lake for round two when Beverly corners him.

“So, Richie, how have you been?” she asks innocently enough.

“Oh, y’know, just kicking ass and taking names.”

“Uh-huh,” she nods, playing along. “I just couldn’t help but notice, you and Eddie...”

“What?” he laughs it off, “There’s nothing to notice! I don’t know what you’re—”

“Relax,” she says, holding one hand up. “Richie, it’s okay.”

“Okay?” whispers Richie frantically, making sure the others aren’t paying attention to them. “How can it be okay? How can *anything* about this situation be okay? I’m supposed to be all about girls and boobs and... and... *not* my best friend!”

“I just thought...” she trails off, looking apologetic. “I’m sorry. I thought maybe it was an old topic. Have you... told anyone?”

Richie looks away, trying to keep his breaths even. “No, I...”

She rubs his arm comfortingly, giving him an assuring smile. “I won’t tell anyone.” Richie nods, resisting the urge to rub his eyes. “I just want to say, it’s okay to like both, you know.”

“What?” says Richie.

“Girls *and* boys,” she explains. “I have a friend in Portland who’s told me she likes both. I... don’t want you thinking you’re *wrong* to like both.”

Unable to help himself from glancing over to where Eddie is currently sitting atop Mike’s shoulders in the water, Richie takes Bev’s words into account, but at this point in time it does little to ease his conscience. Never had he thought to still be in this position: still pining over one of his best friends and completely sure on it never happening. Sometimes he wishes it had *never* happened.

“I just wish... that I didn’t...” he stops.

“Yeah,” says Bev. “I know.”

\*

It was the beginning of a new school year, and Richie wants to join a sports team badly – maybe to finally get a chance to bond with his dad over something of interest for once.

Derry High only offers baseball and football to its students, and while Richie thinks their schools token blue jerseys would look amazing on him, he decides to go with baseball.

“Try-outs are starting soon, yeah?” asks Eddie as they stand on front of the news board in the main hallway. “Why baseball?”

Richie picks up the pencil that hangs from its string and begins to sign his full name. “I dunno. I just remember having a lot of fun with a bat last summer.”

Eddie makes a small noncommittal sound.



“Think I’ll make the team?”

“Yeah man,” laughs Eddie. “You don’t believe in the no-win scenario anymore.”

Richie grins. “Promise you’ll come to every game?”

“Oh yeah, I’ll be the one on the sidelines with the bright pink pom-poms,” says Eddie as they head to their third class. Richie pulls Eddie flush to his side.

“That’s my Eds.”

\*

All of the Losers come out to watch his first game.

Eddie doesn’t come bearing pom-poms like he’d said, but he does carry with him a mobile first-aid kit.

“In case you get too ahead of yourself out there,” teases Eddie.

“Ha ha,” says Richie as he straightens out his uniform. Everyone wishes him luck before he jogs out onto the field, taking his spot near second base.

Before the starting whistle blows, he sees all of his friends stand up, each of them lifting up their shirts to spell out his name in bright red letters. Although there wasn’t someone to brand the ‘E’, Richie didn’t care, especially when he gets to see Eddie’s smiling face as he shows off his ‘R’ proudly.

They win the match, and Richie has a hard time thinking of another moment when he’s felt this accomplished, this *important*.

“Celebration back at my place?” asks Mike. “We can use the barn. I found some of my old man’s beer there.”

“Sneaky Mikey,” says Richie. “I’m in!”

The six of them mount their bikes and ride down to Mike’s place, and when Richie lets go of the handle bars to test his balance Eddie yells

at him, “*Idiot* – be careful!”

Richie laughs, and soon it turns into a joyful holler that he can't contain, all of them speeding down the road like they hadn't a care in the world.

The sky that night was cloudless, with millions of stars looking down at them from above. Stan and Ben try to talk them through all of the constellations, but Richie ends up losing track after the first few. After they've passed a bottle of beer between them all, Richie decides he doesn't quite like the taste at all, and disappears behind the barn to light up a cigarette.

Only a few minutes pass before someone searches him out.

“Richie—!” when Eddie sees him he comes to a halt. “Wait, since when do you *smoke*?”

Richie butts it out immediately, knowing how much Eddie dislikes the smell. “I tried one when Bev visited.”

“Oh,” says Eddie, and his nose scrunches up how Richie adores. He has his hands behind his back, and Richie grows curious the more Eddie fidgets.

“You're not about to murder me in cold blood, are you? And right after my first win, too. I knew you were jealous,” says Richie, and Eddie rolls his eyes.

“No jackass, here,” and Eddie reveals to him a neatly wrapped package complete with a blue bow on top.

“My birthday's not for another two months,” says Richie, but takes the gift anyway.

“It's not a birthday present. I just saw it, and... thought you'd like it,” says Eddie.

Not one to wait, he rips into the present, letting the paper fall to his feet as he picks up what appears to be a t-shirt. It's pitch black (his favourite colour to wear right now) and he slowly unfolds it to reveal Metallica's logo across the front in silver font.

“Yowza!” says Richie, and he jumps up to get a better look at it in the light. “Eds, this is amazing! You didn’t have to get this for me!”

Eddie shrugs, but he seems pleased. “I know they’re your favourite at the moment. Going through your goth phase early, right?”

“Hey, chicks dig this look,” insists Richie. “Been getting so much ass, dude.”

“Please,” scoffs Eddie. “The last time you were in a woman was when you visited the Statue of Liberty.”

“I’ve never been to New York.”

“Exactly.”

“Ouch,” says Richie, and can’t help but grin proudly. He doesn’t wait to put it on and starts to undress. Eddie is staring at him when he looks back up. “How’s it look?”

“Good,” says Eddie.

Richie wishes, more than anything in that moment, that he could tell Eddie the words he can never seem to be able to find. Instead he covers his mouth with his hand and tries to imitate a pilot announcement. “Welcome aboard to Richie Tozier Airlines ladies and gentlemen, this is flight sixty-nine and a nonstop service to paradise!” he finishes with a suggestive thrust.

“I’m too old for this shit,” mumbles Eddie.

\*

Without Bowers gang lurking around school and getting ready to jump them, it becomes easier for them all to roam the halls or hang out in parts of town they never used to. But even as they all started to age, there would always be others bigger than them. And Richie comes to learn that Eddie wasn’t as scared to back out of a fight, despite his lack of growth compared to the others.

Which is what happens one day after school and Richie finds himself waiting for Eddie to show up. Frustrated that maybe Eddie forgot to

tell him otherwise, Richie goes to search him out, and that's how he finds his friend punching it out with several guys on the track field.

"What's a pip-squeak like you wanting to join track?" one of them spits. Eddie aims to punch him until another appears at his side and trips Eddie to the ground.

"You'll never make it, *faggot*."

"Oh, I will. You guys don't scare me, you're fucking pathetic," says Eddie, and he grins through the blood pooling in his mouth.

"Watch yourself, Kaspbrak," Justin Belcher – their ringleader – warns, and he lands another hit on Eddie's cheek.

"Hey!" yells Richie, and his feet are running before his brain can even catch up. "Why don't you go sniff some glue behind the bleachers, Justin? It'd be a better use of your time."

Justin cranes his neck around to face him. "Bucky Beaver, huh. Nothing to see here, so how about you head on back to your dam now, it's getting pretty late."

"Original," says Richie, and is proud when he doesn't flinch after Justin spits in his face. His entourage shoves Richie roughly as they pass, and then he hurriedly helps Eddie to his feet to get a good look at the damage, inspecting his face closely.

"Nothing's broken," says Richie finally, relieved.

Eddie sloppily wipes the blood off his chin. "I know. I'm fine."

"So you wanna join track, huh?" asks Richie, mildly hurt Eddie hadn't told him about it.

"I knew you and the others would just freak out, like, 'Oh, poor, sweet little Eds wants to play sports, but however will he manage to overcome *all* of his illnesses?'" says Eddie.

"Are you kidding me? Eds, I know you're *more* than capable. You're one of the strongest people I know," says Richie, completely honest. "So you wanna get stronger? Cool, I'll help in any way I can. Justin

*Jackass* Belcher won't fucking know what hit him."

Eddie searches Richie's face, his eyes suddenly a touch glossier than before. And then he smiles, nodding once, and holds out his hand to perform their signature handshake that Richie convinced him to learn last year.

And if Richie holds on a second too long, then Eddie doesn't mention it.

\*

They help Eddie to train every day after school, coming up with elaborate lies to convince Eddie's mother he wasn't doing anything too strenuous to his health. Rain or shine Richie doesn't miss a single day, during which he didn't think it was possible to grow any fonder of Eddie Kaspbrak, but somehow he did.

Over time Mike and Ben had both earned spots on the football team, while Bill and Stan stuck to joining things like the chess or astronomy club.

Finally their hard work had paid off and Eddie found himself a place on the track team.

"I guess all of those tiny shorts you wear weren't for nothing," says Richie when Eddie steps out of his bathroom wearing the team's signature uniform. "It had all been practice for this."

"Man, you know I look good," says Eddie, and Richie can't deny it.

"Hey, what do you wanna do for your sixteenth? Anything fun?" asks Richie.

Eddie sits down on his bed next to Richie and picks absentmindedly at his friendship bracelet. Richie has insisted many times that he can make another one, since that one was getting old and kind of gross. But for some reason, Eddie refuses.

"I haven't really thought about it much," admits Eddie.

"What? Seriously?"

"I guess," says Eddie, "I don't know if my mom would even let me do anything too crazy."

"Pfft," Richie begins to pace back and forth on the carpet. "Crazy-shmazy. You're turning *sixteen*, Eds. This is a big deal!"

"I know we went hard on your sixteenth, but all I really wanna do is just hang out with you guys," says Eddie, and his tone has gone quiet, like it always does whenever he thinks about how old they're all getting.

Richie stops to think properly. Eddie has curled in on himself a bit, and Richie's heart hurts just looking at him. He wishes he knew the right words to say, to not spew a joke or two to lighten the mood. Eddie has become too important in Richie's life, and Richie has accepted it is always going to feel this way.

"Hey, just leave it to me," assures Richie, crawling over to pull Eddie against him. "It'll be the best birthday ever. Trust me."

"Okay," whispers Eddie as his hands grip at Richie's back.

\*

Richie knew Eddie wasn't one for surprise parties, so he crossed that option off the list.

He didn't want anything elaborate, nor loud. Richie threw out the idea of hosting it at Eddie's place, or any of the other Loser members houses. It didn't seem like enough, and Richie wants to give Eddie the best. So he scouts areas around town, wracking his brain for a good spot. And then he remembers: the abandoned observatory at the end of Winston road.

It was almost too perfect.

So he tells the others to keep the date a secret, and Richie (with the help of Mike) went about on how to break in at night to set everything up.

"Leave me to find a way to open up the ceiling," says Ben.

“Okay,” nods Richie. “I’m going to distract Eddie for a while before I take him there. So, everyone, on three – and break!”

His friends all cheer and then Richie races home to start on making Eddie’s gift.

\*

“Wakey, wakey Spaghetti Man! Time to face the music!” says Richie as he climbs through Eddie’s bedroom window.

“Ugh, what...” groans Eddie before he throws his pillow towards Richie blindly.

“No time to be cute, Eds, we got a big day to get through!”

After some time Richie manages (with great effort, too) to drag Eddie out of his house with only minor protests from Sonia Kaspbrak.

They meet up with the other Losers so they can all give Eddie their birthday wishes, until soon Richie pulls Eddie away and watches his friends bike off to the observatory (but not before Ben gives him the a-okay on the ceiling situation) to set up. He takes Eddie to the Aladdin, figuring it was one of the more effective time killers.

“That was great!” says Eddie after they leave the movie theatre hours later. “I didn’t think it was possible to improve over the last Terminator, but they did it.”

*Shit, this could almost be like a date,* thinks Richie.

In a last ditch effort to kill time Richie invites Eddie over to his place. They slink past Richie’s parents and up to his room and Richie moves about quickly to tidy up whatever junk he has lying about. He realizes Eddie hasn’t been in his room for ages. They always meet up somewhere else now. Richie feels suddenly nervous.

Eddie takes a seat and gives Richie a smile.

“So, here...” says Richie, and hands a small gift to Eddie. “Happy birthday, Eds.”

Eddie shoots him a look, but opens it cautiously, making sure the paper doesn't tear. Inside is a mixed tape Richie spent hours going through his dad's old records to make. He can see the exact moment Eddie's face lights up.

"Dude!"

"It's got all of your favourites," says Richie. "You name it – Collins, Wham, Carpenters, Beatles—"

"It's got Norwegian Wood?"

"Obviously."

There's a pause. "Richie..." starts Eddie, and within a blink of an eye, his arms are around Richie in a hug.

Richie is certain Eddie can hear how fast his heart is suddenly beating, but he doesn't let the opportunity go to waste and hugs back tightly.

"Hey," murmurs Richie. "Is that a mixtape in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?"

Eddie pulls away with a groan, but his gaze remains fond. Richie feels every surface of his skin turn hot.

"Come on, I got one more thing to show you."

Eddie raises an eyebrow, but follows him down the stairs and back outside nonetheless. Only as they begin to pick up their bikes to head off, Richie stops Eddie in his tracks and gestures over to his own bike.

"Let *me* take you there," says Richie.

"Why?"

Richie pulls out a blindfold from his pocket and gives Eddie a smile. "Can't spoil the surprise, now can we? C'mon, don't you trust me?"

Eddie seems to hesitate, but after some deliberation he sighs. "It can't be helped, can it?"



“Nope.”

“Fine,” says Eddie, and Richie makes sure the blindfold isn’t too tight when he wraps it around Eddie’s eyes. He allows a single moment of weakness and lets his fingers comb through Eddie’s soft hair, before pulling back on a cough. Richie guides him until he’s seated behind him on the bike, and when Eddie’s arms secure around his waist Richie is sure he suffers a minor heart attack.

“Alright then, let’s get this party started!”

\*

“Okay, we’re almost there,” says Richie as he guides Eddie up the steps to the observatory’s door. Eddie’s grip on his hands tightens when he trips on a lone rock. “The others are just inside.”

“I thought the point of surprise parties was that we’re *not* supposed to know people are inside,” says Eddie.

“Just humour me, okay.”

The heavy door creaks as it opens, and once Richie sets Eddie in place he removes the blindfold to reveal their friends there, all wearing party hats and bright smiles.

“Happy birthday, Eddie!”

Although the moonlight is the only source of light in there, nothing could prove to be as bright as the glee that appears on Eddie’s face. It’s the clearest they’ve ever seen the stars in Derry, and all of the Losers admire it from below as they celebrate Eddie’s big day.

“This is amazing,” says Eddie, and he makes a point to look at each of them. “Thanks you guys, really.”

“I-it was Richie’s idea,” says Bill.

“Ah, well,” says Richie, not wanting the attention for once. “Ben got the roof open. That’s the best part.”

“No, that’s not the best part,” says Stan, and he points to a landing

two stories up. “The view up there is even better. Go check it out!”

“Oh, cool!” says Eddie, and begins to walk over to the stairs leading up there. “You coming, Rich?”

“Me?” says Richie.

“You two are the only ones who haven’t been up there,” says Mike around a grin.

“Have fun!” adds Ben.

“I love you guys, but you’re the worst,” mutters Richie, but he follows after Eddie anyway. When they reach the top the chill in the air hits them harder, and before Richie thinks about what he’s doing he shrugs off his leather jacket and drapes it across Eddie’s shoulders.

“I’m not a girl. I can handle the cold,” says Eddie, but he still keeps the jacket.

“I know you’re not a girl,” says Richie, and boy, he can’t help but wonder how much easier this would be if he were.

They fall silent, until only the faint howling of the wind blowing by and the soft murmurs from their friends below fill up the void. Richie can’t help it when something heavy refuses to leave his stomach, something relentless and daunting. He looks at Eddie and can’t help but want, can’t help but *need*, watching this boy watch the stars and thinking he would be happy to spend the rest of his life just like this, right here standing next to him.

“It’s beautiful,” Eddie finally says.

“*You’re* beautiful,” Richie can’t help but slip out, and it’s like time completely stops.

Eddie freezes, and all too slowly he turns to Richie with wide eyes, his hands gripping around Richie’s jacket to the point where his knuckles turn white.

Richie knows he needs to say something, *anything*, to fix whatever shit is about to happen, only Eddie beats him to it.

“Kiss me.”

Richie feels as though he’s been sucker-punched. “What?”

Eddie draws in a trembling breath. “I... I want you to kiss me.”

“Really?” stumbles Richie, just to be sure. “You know you’ll basically be kissing your mom, since we shared so much spit today—”

“Richie, I swear to God—” starts Eddie, and Richie jumps into gear.

“Okay, okay,” he says, and steps closer until he’s in Eddie’s space. He can feel Eddie’s warm breath on his chin; he can feel Eddie’s shaking hands when they grip onto his Metallica t-shirt; he can feel how badly his heart is threatening to beat right out of his chest.

And then Eddie whispers one final “*Rich...*” before the distance between them disappears and Richie has Eddie’s lips caught between his in a kiss.

White-hot heat spreads throughout every part of his body, and Richie can’t help but adore how soft Eddie’s lips are when they start to move against each other. He cups Eddie’s cheek while his other hand cards through Eddie’s soft, soft hair, and Richie is terrified this is all just a dream.

Not long passes before Eddie has to draw back to suck in a breath, but then he’s diving forward again and Richie is pulling him in closer than before by his waist and everything about the kiss turns desperate and messy and their noses clash and Richie feels like he just might explode from pure happiness alone.

Suddenly there are calls and whistles from down below.

“*Damn, Tozier!*”

“Geez you two, get a room!”

“Eddie’s got *game!*”

Richie reluctantly pulls back on a groan, and he flips their friends off while Eddie laughs into his neck.

“They really are the worst,” says Richie, but hardly means it.

Eddie draws back to look at him and his cheeks are dusted an adoring pink while the moonlight shines brightly in his eyes. Richie thinks he wouldn't mind going blind if the last thing he ever saw was this boy right in front of him.

“You're the worst thing that's ever happened to me,” breathes Eddie, and his voice breaks with untapped emotion. And God if those aren't the sweetest words that have ever left Eddie's mouth.

So Richie wraps his arms around Eddie and pulls him back in where he belongs, his face almost splitting in half from how hard he's smiling, and Richie feels like he could fly right up into the sky and beyond the clouds and the stars and straight to the moon.

“I fucking love you, too, Eds.”

#### **Author's Note:**

thank you all so much for reading, lemme know  
what you think xx  
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